

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of History, Religion and Philosophy
Department of English and Modern Languages

REPORT ON YOUR RESEARCH 2014-15

Dear Research Student

The University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research requires you to produce an annual progress report on your research (typically no more than two pages). Your report should focus on self-assessment of the research you have accomplished, and might include topics such as libraries/archives/galleries visited, any written work done, contact with supervisors. If appropriate, you could also refer to seminars given, or publications achieved. You could also include your programme of related studies – seminars, lectures, conferences attended. You may, if you wish, also comment on the School's, and the University's, provision for research students in terms of administration and accommodation. In addition to your report there are two important requirements to note:

1. *Students in their **third year and above (full-time) and fourth year and above (part-time)** are required to submit a time-table of completion with this report. This must be signed by both student and the Director of Studies.*
2. ***All students must submit a piece of work (to be agreed with your Supervisor) to Turnitin as part of annual monitoring – please see Jill Organ's email to all research students of June 2nd entitled **Access to Moodle and Turnitin for RDSC Annual Progress Monitoring 2014/2015*****

If there is anything you may wish to say in confidence, please send the report separately to the Dr Glen O'Hara, Postgraduate Research Lead, HSS

PLEASE RETURN THE REPORT, SIGNED AND DATED, NO LATER THAN Tuesday 30th June 2015.

TO: Charmian Hearne, Research Administrator, Tonge Building, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford OX3 0BP.

A hard copy is preferable but if necessary you can email it to chearne@brookes.ac.uk. Many thanks for your help.

NB - Please remember to copy the report to your supervisory team as well.

YOUR NAME: Cat Rushmore

YOUR SUPERVISOR: Viviane Quirke, Glen O'Hara, Peter Morris

REPORT:

I have continued my research on chemicals used in the home, garden and dark room. In June 2014 I attended an afternoon conference "Chemistry as a Hobby" which was put together by the historical branch of the Royal Society of Chemistry. It confirmed that nobody is researching truly domestic uses of chemicals, as the talks were on chemistry sets, home laboratories in which the uses of chemicals were really restricted to chemical experimentation or demonstration. The other theme that I thought was interesting was

communicating chemistry, though again, this was through formal means of attending lectures or accessing text books, rather than the chemistry that is picked up by people who aren't especially interested in it, such as the chemistry communicated through popular culture, books, films, news discussions about health or chemical violence, the use of everyday chemical products.

In August 2014, I took some trips to look at material cultures of photography. I visited the stores at MOSI where the administrator Sallyann was very helpful and walked me through some MIMSY catalogue searches, which she kindly printed out as well as helped to locate to look at in person. I also visited the galleries at the National Media Museum in Bradford, to see how photographic chemicals were presented there. A very limited selection of chemicals, only flash powder and packets of developer were shown, mirroring the limited selection of household chemicals to laundry detergent, soaps and polishes. The curator confirmed this although said that their books and archives were more varied. However, I had already got a reasonable selection of archival material from MOSI relating to sales material and price lists, so did not pursue this. I then went to visit Hardman's House in Liverpool, a National Trust property which belonged to a couple of photographers who used it as their professional portrait studio outfit, their home and a home photographic studio and darkroom. Described as a 1950s time capsule, it was interesting to see the combination of professional and domestic, as well as the far greater variety of chemicals on display.

In September 2014, I attended a one day conference in Cambridge, the Everyday Life Symposium. Again, while interesting to attend and thought provoking, it confirmed that chemicals are not being studied as part of everyday life, or as everyday objects. In December, I attended the Society for History of Alchemy and Chemistry winter meeting, where I was excited to find a group who were studying domestic chemistry. This is a collaboration between an anthropologist and chemists at UCL, which is focused more on educating contemporary users about the chemicals in everyday products, rather than the history. It seems to be geared more to 'impact', with a website being planned for people to research the chemicals in products, but there are interesting connections to my work.

In March 2015 I developed an activity for the Oxford Brookes Science Bazaar to contribute a chemicals theme to the unit's Helixes and Humours grouping of activities. Children used baking soda, lemon juice or ketchup to make dull pennies bright again. While there was some anxiety about which was 'best', it was an introduction for many children to the concept of 'elbow grease' as they observed that others could get better results than them no matter which chemical they chose. Hit of the day was indicator paper, rather than my posters or my demonstration, but taken altogether and as long as nobody tried to clean anything with ketchup at home, it was counted as success when a steady stream of people came to do a cleaning activity.

In April 2015 I completed 'Advertising and Society' a MOOC course by Duke University, delivered through Coursera, which was relevant to the study of adverts that I have undertaken in my case studies. It was a useful grounding in discussion of images, as well as the processes that advertising agencies go through to develop adverts. I had been worried that my understanding of adverts was based too firmly on the fictitious Mad Men TV series, but the course content matched well with what I had seen in the History of Advertising Trust archives, and encouraged me to do some more background reading.

In May 2015, I presented a poster at the postgraduate Spring School Living in a Toxic World, on my work relating to the weedkiller paraquat. It was really great to feel part of a cohort of postgraduates who are interested in chemical influences on users. While many of them are more interested in long term chronic chemical exposures, my focus on the acute effects which were of more concern in the 1930s-1980s was not out of place. By my repeated questions about physical experiences with objects, I think I emphasised the importance of

evidence held in items that are not documents and that users could or perhaps could not make choices based on what they could see, smell, touch, hear as well as read. There was a bland, one dimensional story of users being passive victims of corporate capitalism, which I have not seen in my research, it is more complicated than that.

I also visited the archives of the Co-operative Society, hoping to find information about washing soda, though perhaps unsurprisingly they were very focused on their own soaps and compounded cleaning products rather than chemicals such as soda. Best find of the trip was a catalogue of promotional films, useful for my retail history strand.

I have not attended departmental training sessions or research seminars as I have unfortunately been out of the country when they have taken place but I have gratefully received the notes and accompanying slides of presentations when they have been forwarded on. I have attended a couple of seminars which were very interesting, and it was nice to have the chance to socialise. In my absence at Brookes, I have attended seminars at my old department CHSTM in Manchester. So far, I have not had success with supplementing the users found in documentary evidence with oral history interviews, so I need to approach this with renewed vigour to strengthen this aspect of my thesis.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Ryman', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Date:

15 June
2015